

Two Poets of the Peasantry

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billion particular cases of conduct, too
complicated for
such simple principles. Dragons have given
place to
microbes; chariots to internal-combustion
engines, which
it takes more than hammer and bellows to
put to rights.
And on the positive side does not a great
weariness fall
upon the mind at injunctions to love
everybody, as a
panacea for the world's ills? Is it not
strange that men
should have been so slow to discover that
the verb 'to
love* has never existed, outside grammar-
books, in the
imperative mood? And do we really want to
love the
inhabitants of Tasmania, or to be loved by
them? Stretched
so widely, the word love' forfeits all its
depth; to gain the
world, it loses its meaning.

Why then read Langland? Partly for his
human in-
terest. A character like his, which never
relaxes its stern
sincerity to trifle even for a moment, is
always apt to
grow boring; yet it is always interesting
also. Naked
souls are rare; most of them go masked
beyond recogni-
tion; but Langland, whatever his faults,
always rings true.
And together with himself he has revealed a
great deal of
this strange mediaeval world that bred him.
But Lang-
land is more than food for historians. He is
also a vivid
artist in his own way—a poet gifted both in
eye and ear.
To think that he would one day be read for
his style,
would doubtless have filled him with rage

and despair
that human souls could be so frivolous. Yet
such is the
common lot of preachers and moralists. It
has happened
to *Ecclesiastes* and Isaiah and Plato, to Dante
and Donne,
to Bunyan and Jeremy Taylor. It is simply
that men's
feelings about beauty are more vital than
their theories
about good. Hence this extraordinary fact,
which from
its familiarity we take for granted, that we
can still enjoy
even the expression of ideas (like Donne's,
for instance)
as obsolete and disgusting, morally, as the
old clothes left